



Susan Bysiewicz
SECRETARY OF THE STATE
CONNECTICUT

For Immediate Release:

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- NEWS RELEASE -

BYSIEWICZ TO REP. CARUSO: PLEASE HELP PASS VOTER PRIVACY BILL IN HOUSE

SECRETARY OF THE STATE SAYS VOTER PRIVACY AT STAKE

HARTFORD: Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz today May 5, 2008 called on State Representative Christopher Caruso, the chairman of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, to bring S.B. #444 to a vote in House of Representatives. Provisions of S.B. #444 touted by the Secretary of the State and passed by the State Senate codifies critical safeguards to guarantee every voter's fundamental Constitutional right to vote privately and independently at the polls.

"We have less than 72 hours before the end of the 2008 legislative session," Bysiewicz said, "After conducting hearings in every Congressional district in the state, it is clear Connecticut citizens want more privacy protections in place with our new optical scan voting system."

In a letter to Rep. Caruso Sec. Bysiewicz wrote, "We are preparing for a record turnout in November and it is critical that we provide local election officials with concrete guidance about how best to safeguard voter privacy. Voters in our state have a right to expect that we will protect their most fundamental civil right and this bill provides a good framework to do just that."

Among other provisions, SB #444 guarantees the following:

(Voters zone of privacy) Registrars of voters shall ensure that each voting booth is placed so that they are in plain view of all election officials and electors waiting to vote and so that there are at least three feet between each voting booth. Each voting booth shall be so placed so that no person outside the booth can determine how an individual voted.

(Zone of privacy around voting machines) The voting machine shall be placed at least three feet from any wall, partition or guardrail and at least four feet from the checkers' table. The registrars of voters shall place a guardrail or other marking device around such machine so as to prevent electors waiting in line from encroaching upon an elector who is submitting their ballot into the voting machine. Such guardrail or other marking device shall be placed at least three feet from the voting machine and shall be arranged in such a manner as to prevent voters from determining the votes cast on each ballot submitted to the machine.

(Privacy sleeve) The registrars of voters shall ensure that each ballot clerk offer every voter a privacy sleeve into which the ballot can be inserted so that the markings on the ballot cannot be seen or it may be placed in every voting booth for the elector's use. The voter shall not be required to accept a privacy sleeve.

SB #444 passed the Senate overwhelmingly on April 24, 2008 and awaits action in the House. It must be approved by Wednesday May 7th at midnight in order to go to Governor M. Jodi Rell for her signature.

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May 5, 2008

The Honorable Christopher Caruso
Government and Elections Administration Committee
Room 2200
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: S.B. 444 (House Calendar #449)

Dear Representative Caruso:

As the current legislative session draws rapidly to a close, I am writing to you to urge your leadership in moving passage of S.B. 444 (House Calendar #449) in the House. While there are other provisions in the bill (reduction in the number of Registrars in North Branford, bringing the remaining handful of towns and boroughs onto a November election calendar, providing easier access to absentee ballots for persons with disabilities), the key reason this bill is so important is that it codifies critical safeguards to guarantee every voter's fundamental Constitutional right to vote privately and independently at the polls.

S.B. 444 (House Calendar #449) addresses concerns raised by our mutual constituents all over the state. At the hearings conducted in each Congressional District by the GAE

Committee, voters testified about inconsistent practices at the polls in the area of voter privacy. In some polling places, voters were offered privacy folders for their ballots; in others, they were not. In some polling places, voting booths were placed too close together and voters felt that it was too easy for others to see how they voted. In other polling places, machine tenders were too close to the voting machines and could see voters' ballots.

We introduced the concept of a "zone of privacy" for voters when we submitted our legislative package to you in January, and we were delighted to see our package move forward and to see passage of S.B. 444 in the Senate. Both The Hartford Courant and The New Haven Register endorsed the voter privacy provisions as a good measure to address voter concerns. With just three days left in the session, I am deeply concerned that the voices of our voters will not be heard. We are preparing for a record turnout in November and it is critical that we provide local election officials with concrete guidance about how best to safeguard voter privacy. Voters in our state have a right to expect that we will protect their most fundamental civil right and this bill provides a good framework to do just that.

With an increasingly bleak budget outlook, S.B. 444 does not require the expenditure of additional resources to ensure that protections critical to voters are in place for November. I know that you have heard the citizens from around the state who took time away from their lives to speak at hearings and that you take their concerns very seriously. Please act now by supporting S.B. 444.

Thank you for your leadership on behalf of Connecticut voters.

Sincerely,

Susan Bysiewicz
Secretary of the State